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THE RED CROSS

IN CHARGE OF

JANE A. DELANO, R.N.

AMERICAN RED CROSS TOWN AND COUNTRY NURSING SERVICE

BY FANNIE F. CLEMENT, R.N.

The question, Why visiting nurses prefer public health work to any other branch of nursing, has been brought out in a study made by the Rural Nursing Committee of the National Organization for Public Health Nursing. This question, with others, was asked of many visiting nurses in small communities, among whom were several Red Cross visiting nurses. It can, of course, best be answered by those engaged in this activity who have had experience in other branches. The following is an example of the answers given.

Nearly all commented upon the breadth of opportunity offered. "It is broader and more interesting than any other form of nursing." "It means a wider touch with community life and broader personal growth, as more time is one's own in which to live one's own life." "I can serve a greater number of people." "I feel I am accomplishing more in the world." "I can do more good." "It enables a nurse to accomplish the greatest good for the largest number and tends toward a broad spirit of charity that no other side of nursing allows." "It provides a broader field of helpfulness as I have opportunity to save future adults from needless suffering by preventive work." "The work is instructive and constructive."

Substitute "private duty" or "institutional work" for public health nursing in the foregoing question and we should doubtless learn why nurses, having tried public health work, find themselves in other fields. Yet speaking particularly of the work of a well-qualified public health nurse in the smaller communities, one fact seems indisputable; it would be difficult to find any other activity in the nursing profession that presents opportunities for the extension of beneficial influences on such a broad community basis.

It is often written, "the work is so fully appreciated by patients." "I like to help the poor and those of moderate means who would otherwise be without nursing care and who are so glad to see the nurse." The variety of work seems to have made a strong appeal to many: the fact that no two days are alike; that an insight is gained into all kinds and

conditions of life; the contact made with the most varied class of people; the outdoor life and healthful atmosphere in which they live are also enumerated. A predominating characteristic of the rural nurse is her love of the open country. A steady income, regularity of hours and shorter hours are cited as particular features of public health nursing. "The work is not confining." "It allows freedom of activity." "It gives one a chance to take the initiative." One nurse said she preferred public health nursing to any other work because she sees more of children. One acknowledges her appreciation of a better food supply. The broader experience by generalization in a rural community is mentioned and the home and social life possible. For perhaps the same reason that country people generally seem to find more opportunity for intimacy between friend and neighbor than city dwellers, the visiting nurse in rural districts often finds possible a more intimate touch with patients and families.

What rural nurses have found by their experience to be the necessary qualifications for rural nursing serves as a valuable index to what should constitute the training of nurses who wish to enter this field. Some mentioned first a high school education. Almost invariably the nurses stipulated a good hospital training and emphasized the need of special study and preparation for the work following the hospital training school course. It is significant that this need of special training in public health nursing is expressed in many cases by those who had never had this advantage. Many suggestions for preparation were given, showing what each felt to be a special need. Among the suggestions were the following: "a course of visiting nursing in some good visiting nurse association;" "a study of different societies ready to help the tuberculous, defectives and delinquents and of laws concerning health;" "visits to social service departments of hospitals to get an insight into their methods;" "a definite knowledge of tuberculosis work;" "a thorough training in the care of growing children, an understanding of their mental and physical development;" "experience with a rural nurse." One nurse thinks that the most valuable preparation comes from work in city schools. Another speaks of the necessity of familiarizing herself with the problems underlying suffrage, political economy, eugenics, personal hygiene and general sanitation. The rural nurse should have a teaching knowledge of several subjects classified under handicrafts, something that will both entertain and instruct those with whom she is called upon to work in rural districts.

All nurses believe good health especially necessary and this, too, tempered by such qualities as cheerfulness, enthusiasm, good judgment, patience, adaptability, firmness, courage, even temperament and love

of work. The rural nurse must have a sense of humor and a discreet and silent tongue. She must have a knowledge of country traditions, be in sympathy with country people and willing to give up city comforts when necessary. She must have an interest in everyday affairs and topics of the times. One nurse enumerates good standards, good health and human interests; another, the broadest intelligence and best training that can be secured; a well-balanced, broad-minded, womanly character, age to be not younger than thirty; ability to teach and experience in managing a horse. One suggested it was an advantage if country bred. A qualification that would seem to apply equally well to all social service was a never-ending charity for the shortcomings of human beings, a charity that builds up, that overcomes, ever hopeful of ultimate reconstruction.

From this survey, the responsibilities of the rural nurse as she herself feels them may be discerned and from the fact that she realizes so strongly the importance of the highest requirements as to personal and professional qualifications in her work, shows not only the type of woman already in the field but what we may expect of those who wish to enter it.

ITEMS

The exhibit of the Town and Country Nursing Service, after having been in St. Louis at the time of the nurses' convention and in Memphis at the Conference of Charities and Corrections, was on exhibition at the State University in Morgantown, W. Va., at the meeting of the State Educational Association in June. The Civic Club of Clarksburg, W. Va., in affiliation with the Town and Country Nursing Service, arranged for their Red Cross visiting nurse to attend this meeting and to explain her work as a rural nurse, particularly as it relates to the physical welfare of the child in school and the necessity of coöperation of teachers and school authorities in the work of the nursing association. In the same manner the Hot Springs Valley Visiting Nurse Association of Virginia had loaned their Red Cross Visiting Nurse to the Conference for Education in the South in April and during each day of the four days' session, she held a demonstration in rural nursing, explaining its scope and results.

Red Cross visiting nurses are readily responding to an increasing number of calls to tell about their work at meetings of nurses' associations and gatherings of social workers. At a meeting of the Alabama Sociological Congress in May, the Red Cross visiting nurse in Chilton County of that state, told of her work as county nurse under a committee composed of the county health officers, the county superintendent

of schools, the county agent of the Farmers' Union and several other men and women.

The organization of the Health Committee was inaugurated under the auspices of the Rural Organization Service of the Department of Agriculture a few months ago, which has been making a social survey in this country. Public and private funds support the nursing activity. In Alabama there are "beats" or territorial divisions which include several school districts. A county improvement association with branches in each beat, under a beat manager, has been lately organized. Each beat is subdivided into school districts where a superintendent is head of a small group.

Owing to the size of her territory the nurse is concentrating upon the inspection of school children and educational work in the school districts. She drives to these various communities, using the horse and carriage furnished by her committee and remains in each several days to a week, working with and through the local branch of the county society. She examines the children, visits their homes and visits any cases of illness reported in the neighborhood. She holds group meetings of mothers in the school-house and general meetings for all in the interest of improving health conditions. Her object this summer is to have a sanitary closet installed at as many of the seventy-one school-houses in her county as possible. She will visit the schools before the term re-opens. For this work she must have the coöperation of the men in the county. She is organizing her Red Cross boys and girls, as she calls them, into various clean-up and health committees. The enthusiasm and real interest in the work which she already has been able to create among young and old, promises well for far-reaching results.